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## Viewing cable 07BOGOTA1407, COLOMBIA AND PANAMA: DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#07BOGOTA1407**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">07BOGOTA1407</a>	<a href="#">2007-03-01 11:41</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Bogota</a>

Appears in these articles:

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3043  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 001407

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/2017

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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA AND PANAMA: DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON  
SENSITIVE BORDER ISSUES

REF: PANAMA 00147

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer - Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

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SUMMARY

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11. (C) Tensions increased between Colombia and Panama after President Uribe announced he would place greater customs restrictions on goods originating from Panama's Colon Free Trade Zone. Panama claims these restrictions would violate a customs agreement signed by the two countries in October 2006, and may take the dispute to the WTO. A Panamanian Embassy official said Uribe was playing political hardball over Panama's refusal to agree to an expansion of the Pan-American Highway through the Darien Gap in Panama. A Colombian Foreign Ministry official said the two issues were separate. Uribe announced the restrictions under growing pressure from the Colombian business community. The GoC said there had been no recent military action along the border along the Panamanian border. The Panamanian Embassy denied reports Panama would require visas for Colombians. End Summary.

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PANAMA OPPOSES HIGHWAY OVER SECURITY CONCERNS  
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12. (C) Panamanian First Secretary Juan McKay said President Alvaro Uribe cornered Panamanian President Martin Torrijos in Ecuador during President Correa's inauguration on January 15, to press for the expansion of the Pan-American Highway through the Darien gap between Panama and Colombia. McKay said most Panamanians were opposed to the expansion fearing it would facilitate FARC operations in Panama, as well as illegal entry by Ecuadorians en route to the United States. He said a rise in kidnappings in Panama, primarily Colombian on Colombian, prompted Panamanian fears. McKay also claimed that Uribe was pushing the highway expansion for personal reasons, since the road would originate in Uribe's hometown of Medellin.

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COLOMBIA SAYS HIGHWAY MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE  
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13. (C) Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Latin American desk officer Antonio Dimate said the GoC wanted to facilitate commerce and to provide infrastructure for the energy integration initiatives under Plan Pueblo Panama. He said the highway would make it easier to control access to and better monitor the remote border region, ensuring greater security for Panama. He added it did not make sense that there was no way to travel by road from Panama to Colombia. DiMate also said that any disagreements over the highway were purely technical and would be addressed at the working level; the two sides had been able to address most environmental concerns in a recently established working group.

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PANAMA SEES TRADE RESTRICTIONS AS PRESSURE FOR HIGHWAY  
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15. (C) McKay claimed Uribe had threatened greater customs restrictions on goods originating in the Colon Free Zone to pressure Panama to agree to the highway expansion. Uribe announced the restrictions at the end of January 2007, claiming lack of progress on contraband controls. McKay said these moves violated the cooperative customs agreement signed by the two countries in October. He said the political motivation behind Uribe's action was clear. Otherwise, Uribe would have waited until the end of the three month review period (February 6) to announce the restrictions. McKay claimed Panama was doing all it could to comply with Colombia's inquiries into Colon businesses, but progress was limited by a lack of resources.

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COLOMBIA SAYS ISSUES ARE UNRELATED  
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16. (C) DiMate said the highway debate and customs agreement were unrelated. Colombia was unhappy with the large volume of contraband originating in the Colon Free Trade Zone, and had not linked the customs agreement to the highway. Under the customs agreement, Panama had agreed to prevent merchants from illegally selling large volumes of shoes and textiles in Colombia for below-market prices--part of the black market

peso exchange. Panama had not complied with its obligations, however, and the Colombian business community was unhappy. The GoC was also tired of dumping that benefited narcotraffickers and armed groups. Members of the Colombian Congress were also concerned that endemic corruption in Colon--and in Panamanian Customs Director Daniel Delgado Diamante's organization--would prevent Panama from ever implementing the agreement in an effective manner.

BOGOTA 00001407 002 OF 002

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RUMORS OF COLOMBIAN TROOP MOVEMENTS AND VISAS  
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¶4. (C) McKay said he had no knowledge of recent reports in Panama of Colombian troop movements on the Panama-Colombia border, other than widely publicized joint Panamanian/Colombian exercises conducted with US military forces (reftel). Colombian military sources told us no military actions have taken place within the last month near the border, and that activity in Choco was taking place far south of the border. The Colombian Army's 17th Brigade, whose area of responsibility includes much of the border region, told us they regularly coordinate with their Panamanian counterparts. On a separate issue, McKay said the Panamanian business community was opposed to the idea of requiring Colombians to obtain Panamanian visas. It would not happen, he said.

DRUCKER

=====CABLE ENDS=====